SOME ASPECTS OF MAITHILA CULTURE

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I

RESPECT FOR TRADITIONAL LEARNING

The History of Mithilā has been singularly free from glorious wars and conquests.[1] With the exception of about a dozen occasions, the Kings of Mithilā have been mainly engaged in building up traditions of learning and art. Indeed, Plato's ideal of 'Philosopher Kings' has perhaps been fulfilled in no other country of the world except Mithila (e. g. Janaka and MM. Maheśa Ṭhakkura).

Before 1,000 B. C. it was the great centre of Vedic and Upaniṣadic lore ; it was the age of Janakas and Yājñavalkyas. Then followed the foundation of at least five of the six orthodox systems of Philosophy—from about 1000 B. C. to 600 B. C. Mithilā, according to some scholars, had the proud privilege of having the rare galaxy of Gautama[2] the author of Nyāya Sūtras, Kaṇāda[3] the propounder of Vaiśeṣika System, Jaimini[4] the founder of Mīmāṁsā, Kapila[5] the propagator of Sāṅkhya Śāstra, and Vyāsa[6] the first author of Vedānta Philosophy. From the Sixth to the Third Century before Christ, Vaiśālī, a town within her borders, became a renowned stronghold of Jaina and Buddhist Logic and Philosophy. Thereafter we find a gap of about five hundred years. By the Sixth Century A. C. or so we have againy unmistakable signs of great

1 *Darbhanga District Gazetteer*, p. 22.

2 Shyamanarayana Singh, *History of Tirhut* p. 190-2; and *Gangānatha Jha Commemoration Volume* (Poona) p. 388.

3 Vindhyeshwari Prasad, Introduction to *Vaiśeṣika-Darśana*, p. 11; and *Mithilamoda*, Udgara 80, p. 4, f. n. 1.

4 *Gangānatha Jha Commemoration Volume* p. 388.

5 *Ibid.* It is not clear if Kakarauda and Kapileśvara are both relics of his residence in Mithila.

6 *Mithilamoda*, Udgara 114. p 11 places his Āśrama at Virauli.

literary and philosophical activity. According to Maithil tradition, Udyotakara, Maṇḍana, Kumārila, Prabhākara, Vachaspati, Udayana and later Gangeśa, Pakṣadhara and several others were engaged in combating Buddhists, and ultimately re-establishing Brahminical thought in the Province.

After the invasion of 'Turks' (=Muslims) another occasion arose when Maithila scholarship asserted itself. While the 'Turks' succeeded in coming down the Ganges as far as Bengal, they somehow bypassed Mithilā, which therefore remained for centuries the home of Hindu Learning and culture. Maithilā Digest (Smṛti Nibandha) writers came forward with Codes of Law and with Handbooks of Polity[7] wherein they recognized the new conditions and tried to protect the purity of their ideals and traditions. Of course, the greatest writers in this field are Chaṇḍeshwara and Vāchaspati Mishra II and several Mimāṁsakas.

Even to this day Mithilā has been able to preserve her interest in and love of the traditional scholarship. There are spread all over the country Tols or catuṣpāṭhī-s (popularly called caupāḍi-s) where Pandits impart education on the old lines. Hundreds of Palm-leaf Mss. and Paper Mss. are read and commented upon in Mithilā even in these days of brisk printing. The Official examination system of Darbhanga Raj (Dhauta parīkṣā)[8] is based on the old Maithila system of Śalākā-Parīkṣā[9] where the candidate is allowed even to have his books by his side when experts take his *viva voce* ; of course, the old system of taking a Śarayantra[10] is no longer current. In the latter system the scholar was even required to present himself for examination by the public ; the scholar who intended to take a Śarayantra could be asked any question on any topic the people liked. From what we know of the last person who is known to have taken

7 *See* Introduction to *Mithila Mss. Catalogue* Vol. I and Intro. to Chandeśvara's *Rajanitiratnakara* by Dr. K. P. Jayaswal.

8 Vide, for example, the Syllabus for a Dhauta-parīkṣā published under the supervision of the late Sir Ganganatha Jha.

9 Vide Satishchandra Vidyabhushan *History of Indian Logic*, p. 522, f. n. 1 and M. M. Gopinatha Kaviraja, *Saraswati Bhawana Studies*, Vol. IV p. 62.

10 Sir Ganganatha Jha, *Kavirahasya*; Dr. K. P. Jayaswal Introduction to *Mithila Mss. Catalogue* Vol. II; and R. Jha, *Twelfth All-India Oriental Conference* (Benares) Proceedings Vols. I. part 2 pp. 310, 325.

it, it seems that it was a sort of Intelligence or General Knowledge Test by the public—for it is related that Gokulanatha Upadhyāya was asked to satisfy his questioners even as to the taste of night-soil. Similarly, the institution of Upādhyāyas, Mahopādhyāyas, and Mahāmahopādhyāyas[11] as graded degrees of seniority among Professors is today extinct.

The marks of this aspect of Maithila Culture are found in various things. Most of Maithila place-names are commemorative of the particular branch of learning that has been perfected or specialized at those places,[12] e. g. Yajuāṛa (seat of Yajurveda), Rigā (seat of Ṛgveda), Atharī (seat of Atharvaveda), Māu-behaṭa (seat of Mādhyandini-śākhā), Kuthumā (seat of Kauthumi Śākhā), Sakari (?) (Sakkarī Śākha), Bhaṭṭasimari and Bhaṭṭapura (seat of Bhaṭṭa School of Mīmāṁsā). Names and even surnames of men, such as Upādhyāya or Jha as common surname and Paṇḍita the surname of potters (of. कुम्भकारोऽपि यत्र पंडित:), indicate the same thing.

Most of the customs and practices of Mithilā are also remnants of this very feature. For example, a peculiar custom mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (IV. iv. iii. 19) is still observed in Mithilā in its original form. On the day after the Sukharātri festival (corresponding to the Dewali festival) a pig is tied to a post or tree outside the village where all domestic animals, such as the cows, buffaloes and bullocks, are brought by every farmer. Then these animals are given a chance to play with the pig, strike it with their horns and, it is believed, the more the pig cries the better are the fruits and harvests of the people.

Similarly, there are various customs and usages which can be traced to the fact that the roots of Brahminical culture are deeply engrained in Mithilā. Paṇḍita Bhekhanatha Jha has recently completed his monumental work on this subject after twenty years' research, called the *Vyavahāra-vijñāna.* I shall however briefly describe one such Maithila game where principles of philosophy are used for

11 *See* M.M. Dr. Sir Ganganatha Jha's Foreword to Keshi Mishra's edition of MM Sachala Mishra's commentary on *Aryasaptaśati*, p. 11.

12 I am indebted to Pt, Baladeva Mishra, Librarian, Mss. section, Raj Darbhanga for this information,

dialogue : it is called " Ḍhehālela-chchoo "[13]. It begins with a number of boys throwing water on all sides. One of them takes up some water in his hand and asks : "What is in my hand ?" He is told : "Water". Then comes a second boy who also asks : "What is now in my hand ?" The answer given is "An egg". Another boy is made to ask : "Who hatched this egg?" and he receives the reply that "such and such a boy (hatched it)". Then follows the query : "Who will destroy it ?" and the answer "such and such a boy (will destroy it)". Then asks the original questioner, "Who kneads it ?" and they all throw water on any one of the boys saying "so and so (kneads it)" and they will not let him rest till the latter accepts defeat. Now, it is pointed out that the dialogue refers metaphorically to the first creation of Brahmā, *viz.* water, then it describes the Brahmāṇḍa which can be destroyed by Shiva the great destroyer at the time of Pralaya, and lastly it describes the knocks and kicks (Ḍhehā) which a jīva gets in this world till he realizes his defeat and begins to strive after "mukti". Such is also the case with ***sataghardā, dolabātī*** and other Maithila sports and pastimes which are based on some philosophical concept or other.

The cumulative effect of this extraordinary devotion to the Traditional Learning has been on the whole very fruitful in keeping the lights of scholarship and culture burning throughout the ages. Nevertheless, it must be said that it has also been responsible for the excessive orthodoxy and conservativeness that are found in Mithilā "They (Maithilas) are guided by the mint, anise and cumin of the Brahminic Law in their everyday life". [14] They view everything that runs counter to it with great suspicion. The result has been that when the majority of Indian Provinces were giving new lease of life to their languages and literatures by imbibing new influences with the study of Western languages and Literatures, Maithilas remained comparatively static for a long time. This explains the delay in the introduction of Journalism and various other things in Maithilī. This also explains the almost complete neglect of the language in the Educational and Administrative spheres of the Province today.

13 *See* Pt Baladeva Mishra, *Khela men Brahma-Vidya* (*Mithilanka* number of the *Mithilamihira* Darbhanga).

14 Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, Vol. V, Pt. 2.

The exclusive and excessive cultivation of Sanskritic ideals is also responsible for the archaic, complex and comparatively synthetic character of the mother-tongue of Maithilas. The verb-system of Maithilī is extremely complicated, its nouns continue to take inflexions, and its peculiar pronouns and certain other features preserve many obsolete links in the study of Modern Indo-Aryan Philology.

As far as its literature is concerned, it can be said that no Modern Indian Literature has produced writers who follow the lines of Sanskrit Literature so closely. Not only the plots and sources are from Sanskrit, the imagery, the prosody and thought basically associated with Sanskrit and Prakrit till recently, and the treatment of subjects on the lines of Sanskrit classics; but also the types of Sanskrit literature are perpetuated in several Maithilī ways. Thus, the greatest Grammatical Treatise is written in Sūtra-form and has a long Dhātupāṭha attached to it in the Pāṇinian manner; the Maithili Dictionary compiled by the Editor of Mithilāmihira is on the lines of Sanskrit Dictionaries ; the "Regular" Maithilī drama has three languages in it—Sanskrit Prakrit and Maithilī after the manner of Sanskrit dramatists and lastly such types as the Mahākāvyas and Khaṇḍa-kāvyas and Campūs are still the common forms in which Maithilī authors take pride. Even the Folk Tales (the Vratakathās) are inspired by the ideals of Sanskrit works, Purāṇas and Epics. There is a very old custom in Mithilā of obeying a strict procedure of writing letters in Sanskrit; Vidyāpati, Vararuci, Ratnapāṇi and several others have written hand-books on letter writing. In special the letters of invitations on all social and religious occasions are well graded to suit all ranks and relations of the host. Now this has a counterpart in the numerous specimens of letters in Maithilī which form the bulk of Medieval Maithili prose.

In one way the literature of Maithilī has suffered very much by the high esteem in which Sanskrit has been held in Mithilā. The Sanskrit scholars have always considered Maithilī as the Apabhraṁsha language and therefore only fit to embody light literature. This is why we had rarely any serious or scholarly writing in Maithilī. The fit vehicle for it was Sanskrit alone. It is only now that people are prepared to contribute serious works also in the vernacular. Of course, this meant also that the less scholarly

of the Brahmins, the Kāyasthas and other classes of society took the greatest share in producing Maithilī Literature, and have thus balanced the otherwise over-burdening of the language with models and ideas of Sanskrit Literature, and have ultimately brought it nearer the masses than could otherwise be possible with its courtly and aristocratic patronage.

II

THE RELIGION OF MITHILĀ

There has never been any sectarianism in Mithilā. There has neither been ever any new religious order (sāmpradāyika dharma) preached in Mithilā. Maithilas are believers in the Varṇāśramadharma and in simple devotion to Hindu gods and deities. The three main figures who have inspired and animated their souls throughout the ages are Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu; but it should be noted that they have valued them equally as capable of giving supernatural rewards. The threefold marks on the forehead of Maithils represent this; the horizontal lines marked with ashes represent their devotion to Siva, the vertical sandal paste in white represents their faith in Viṣṇu and the dot of sandal paste in red or of vermillion represents their veneration for Sakti.

The worship of Śiva is, however, the most widespread among menfolk of Mithilā. The great popularity of full fasting on a caturdaśi of the dark half of the month, the worship of thousands and lakhs of clay-made Śiva lingas on special occasions, the faith that Śiva alone can ultimately award mukti, and several other things point to the great place that Siva occupies in their hearts.

It is because of this that the songs of Śiva are a speciality of Mithilā. They are of two kinds: *Nachārīs* and *Maheśawānīs*. The former is a class of pure devotional hymns, and the latter deals with married life of Hara and Gaurī. From the days of Vidyāpati till those of Chandā Jha all poets have produced excellent Nachāris the and Maheśawānis. This is why hundreds and thousands of Maithil pilgrims visit Kapileswara, Paśupatinath or carry heavy Kāmaru on foot to the Temple of Vaidyanath Dhām singing "Kakhan harab duhkh mora he bholanath" and shed innumerable

drops of tears of devotion. Almost every important village has a Mahādeva-maṭha or organizes occasional public worship of Mahadeva at least once a year.

Equally widespread is the worship of Śakti. There is, however, one great difference between the two. There is a marked paucity of legends and stories recording any attainment of the siddhis by the worship of Lord Śiva whereas the stories regarding Sākta devotees attaining miraculous powers are numerous. This is probably because Sakti was supposed to give these siddhis only, but the God who could award mukti or salvation was Lord Śiva which was certainly a higher thing. Yet some of Mithilā's greatest saints and Upāsakas have been associated with Sakti, such as Devāditya, Vardhamāna, Madana Upādhyāya, Gokulanatha Upādhyāya, Rajarshi Mithilesha Rameshwara Singh, Gaṇanātha Upādhyāya and a host of Tāntriks; every household has a gosāuni; the first verse taught to a child is in praise of Śaktī; the popularity of Aripana (or Alipans or painted yantras on the ground); the names of Maithils such as Tantradhāri, Tantranāth, Shaktināth, Khadgadhāri, Tārācarana, Ādyācarana etc.; the Śābara rites of Mithilā's women; the sensuous character of the people; the vogue of fish and meat eating; *Pāga* or their Tantric headdress; the offering of sweet cooked rice in milk and the feeding of kumārīs (virgins) called "*Patari ceremony*" (पातांड़े) on all auspicious occasions; the widespread public worship of earthen images of Durga in Dasehra; the Mātrikā-puja and the prevalence of dīksā (iṣṭamantragrahaṇa);—all these point to the great importance of Sakti in Maithil religious life.

The reverence for Sakti has influenced the script and literature of the land. Not only have we a large number of Tantric works written or compiled in Sanskrit, not only have we almost all writers praising Śakti as the Primal (Ādyā) Energy but the script of Maithilī called Maithilākṣara or Tirhutā, also has developed in accordance with Tantric Yantras. This has been detailed in the *Kāmadhenutantra* and the *Varnoddhāra-Tantra*. I shall explain how the letter ra (ব) is formed. The three lines form the '*trikoṇa*' and the line inside is a modern development of a '*Bindu*' which is amply found in Medieval Maithil inscriptions. The *āñji* (*F*) sign

in the beginning of Maithilī alphabet is also due to Tantra influence, for it represents the Kuṇḍalinī. 14*a*

As regards Maithilī Literature, the most important result is Gosāuni-ka Gīta without which no auspicious religious ceremony will ever begin in Mithilā. There are also a large number of songs known as *Jogs* which will be noticed below in another connection. Besides these, a great number of Tantric documents are available in Maithilī in the nature of incantations and charms which have not been fully understood by the experts of Mantra Sāstra even, but nonetheless serve their work very efficaciously.

As contrasted with these two deities, the worship of Viṣṇu, though found here in many aspects, is remarkably free from any great influence on the vernacular literature of the country. The proximity of Sālagrāmī river from whose source we get the Śālagrāma-idol of Viṣṇu, the observance of all principal Vaiṣṇava fasts and festivals, the immense popularity of Bhāgavata, Harivaṁśa and Brahmavaivarta purāṇas— these are some of the signs which show that there is a great influence of Vaiṣṇava worship as well. And possibly Sītā's connection with Rāma also accounts for some cases of Viṣṇu's worship. Whatever might be the opinion of scholars with regard to the long and rich tradition of Maithilī Love Poetry connected with Krishna, it was in lands other than Mithilā where Maithilī was able to produce any great Vaiṣṇava Literature. It is remarkable that Viṣṇu's hymns called "Bhajans" are practically non-existent in pure Maithilī and whenever people need sing them they take recourse to songs in other languages (such as Hindī).

It is, therefore, proper to conclude that the devotional mainsprings of Maithil mind have been Śiva and Śakti.

III

HINDUS AND MUSLIMS OF MITHILĀ

It is remarkable that in so predominantly Brahminical a country there are several features which show a complete fusion of Hindus and Muslims. This is found not only in the large number of Persian and Arabic words which are used by Hindus in the most intimate and sacred places, such as *Kabulā*, *Rikabī*, *Jājarū*, *Tāj*,

14*a* *Vide* Journal of Assam Research Society Vol. I. 3.

Farak, *Dalāna*, *Mahaphphā*, *Habelī* etc. (in the sense of "vowing an offering or sacrifice to a deity", "a dish", "lavatory", "princely or Babuānī cap", "money paid in settling marriages of two parties of different status", "drawing-room, or guest room, or sitting place for gents outside the courtyard", "palanquin", "house of respectable families" etc) leaving aside of course hundreds of words in administrative and official contexts, in spite of the fact that Mithilā is the only part of the India where judgments were delivered strictly according to traditional Hindu manner till as late as the eighteenth Century *A. C.* (*vide* K. P. Jayaswal, JBORS, 1920 on the judgment of Sachala Mishra), —but also in such surnames of Brahmaṇas as Khan, Bakhshi and Chaudhari. The most important fact to be noticed in this connection is, however, the fact that the Tāzia (or *dāhā* as it is called by Mithilā people), is respected, participated, welcomed and even worshipped by every one, whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim. I have myself witnessed the *Dāḥā* coming to our houses and people of my locality going and singing in processions of Tāzia as Hindus do in Rāmalīlā processions in the U. P.

Besides this, Muslims are found devoutly singing songs in praise of Rāma and Krishna as commonly as Hindus worship Muslim saints, such as the *Pañca-piriyā* ; (*vide* Grierson : *Bihar Peasant Life* p. 407). There is one Hindu deity named Bālāpira, who will not be pleased unless he gets hen as the sacrificial animal.

The National Maithil Era is the Fasali Era. Like the rest of India, in music the union of Hindus and Muslims is most patently observed : the Maithil musician Lochana (the author of *Rāgataraṅgiṇī*) is the first prominent Hindu writer who incorporates Iman and Firdausi Rāgas invented by the famous Muslim singer Amir Khusro.

These are, I am sure, telling instances which show how much tolerance and respect the average Hindu of Mithilā shows for the average Muslim of Mithilā. In economic, agricultural, and various other common matters there is no end to this spirit, though in recent months there has been some deterioration of these harmonious relations.

Maithilī has to its credit several Marsiyas and other songs composed by Muslim folk poets. The following specimens will illustrate their good and bad qualities:

(i) *Marsiyā*:—

बीबीक अङ्ना चंदन घन गछिआ रे हाय हाय ō ॥
ओहि उपर कागा मड़ड़ाइ छै रे हाय हाय ō ॥१॥
नहाय सोनाय बीबी बैठल अँगनमाँ रे हाय हाय ō ॥
दशो अंगुरीआ केशवा झारए रे हाय हाय ō ॥२॥
देवौ रे कगवा कान दुनु सोनमाँ रे हाय हाय ō ॥
कहु काग रनक खबरीआ रे हाय हाय ō ॥३॥
कि कहब आहे अमाँ रनक खबरीआ रे हाय हाय ō ॥
खुजल तरुअरिआ हँशा लड़ै रे हाय हाय ō ॥४॥
जाही वन आहे अमाँ सिकिओ ने डोलए रे हाय हाय ō ॥
ताहि वन हँशा छै लड़ै[15] रे हाय हाय ō ॥५॥[15]

(ii) *A complaint of a mother-in-law* :—

सखी देखु मने मन,
बेटी जकाँ पुतहु बजैएं टनाटन ।
नन्दी के बात सुनि करैए ई हनाहन ॥
स्वामीजी के' बचन सुनि गजैए मने मन ।
नहिरा मे अन्न बिना फिरए बने बन ॥
सासूर मे आवि कए खाइए छन छन ।
ससूर जौं किछो बाजे करए भन भन ॥
छोटका देवर के देखि बाजे चनाचन ।
नहिरा मे कड़ा पैइड़ी करए खनाखन ॥
सासुर मे छरा पेन्ह के चलए झनाझन ।
गोतनी से लरए ले' करए सनासन ॥
काम काज कीछ नई करे हनाहन ।
सासु के बचन सुनि करै रनारन ॥
लोक के न लाज राखै बाजै टनाटन ।

15 Grierson, *Maithila Chrestomathy* glves three more instances.

"रहमान" कहत सखी सोचु मनेमन ।
काजक समय मे पुतहु करइए कनकन ॥[16]

IV

MAITHILA 'KULINISM'

In their social structure the Maithils have given birth to an elaborate system of genealogical records which are called in common parlance the Pañjis.* The First King who is said to have re-organized Maithil Society (in about 1310 A. D.) was Mahārāj Harisingh Deva who wanted to protect its purity of blood by making people record their ancestory and avoid the forbidden degrees of relationship in marriages. He made it compulsory for every person to get a certificate of the fact that the contracting parties are not within the forbidden bounds of consanguinity. In course of time these genealogical records assumed gigantic proportions and it was felt necessary that the official *pañjikāras* should be available during *śuddha days* to all people at certain appointed places throughout Mithilā. This is why one of the persistent references in Maithil fiction is to the places called " Sabhāgāchis ", whenever a hero or a heroine is to get married.

The institution of the Ghaṭaka (the person who knew most of these genealogies and helped people in contracting truly admissible marriages) grew out of this very peculiarity in Maithil Society. The typical Ghataka in Maithili literature is Nārada but we have latterly had very funny satirical pictures of the Ghaṭaka who is to-day practically extinct. I shall quote one such instance.

पान गलोठि कैँ उठौलन्हि बात ।
पूछए लगलथीन्ह परिचय पात ॥
हाथमें हुनक नोसिदानी रहन्हि ।
छाता रहन्हि टूटल कमानी रहन्हि ॥
चसरगल छलन्हि कि दनही छलन्हि ॥

16 *Bedhaba Jamana* (published by M. Abdul Rahman, Book-seller, vill. Sarauli. P. O. Ghogharadiha, Distt. Darbhanga), p. 7

*These records may be compared with Bengal's Kulaji texts or Assam's Burañji texts.

साठा पाग रहन्हि चूनक छाँछी जकाँ ।
कनपट्टी क मसुविधि माछी जकाँ ॥
निमूह धनक जाड़ कटैत रहथि ।
पाँजि पाटि मे चेफड़ी सटैब रहथि ॥[17]

Another corollary of this feature of Maithil life was the birth of Bengal Kulinism.[18] Of course in Mithilā itself, the degeneration must have begun first. The main feature of Kulinism is that owing to an exaggerated importance placed on the value of having been born in a high *kula* and owing to the practice of allowing the old Kulins or the

17 Vaidyanatha Mishra *Burha Bara* (a long poem).

18 That the "System of Kulinism was borrowed some centuries ago by the Brahmana of Bengal" from Mithila is a quotation of Risley in his famous work "The People of India" (p. 215) from Girindra Nath Dutt's 'The Kayastha and Brahamanis of Bengal' (1906). The following points also support this:—(a) The Bengali Kulapanjika texts are known after some avowedly Maithila Smṛti Nibandha authorities on marriage, such as Hari Mishra, Vachaspati Mishra; (b) The earliest Kulaji texts do not go before the latter half of the 15th cen. A. C.; indeed, even the genuineness of some early texts are doubtful. [*See* Dr. R. C, Mazumdar, *History of Bengal* (Vol. I pp. 624-25)] whereas Mithila texts of Pañjī are expressly dated in the early 14th cen.; (c) The System of keeping genealogical records among Kayasthas in Assam was borrowed from Mithila : Says Mr. N. N. Vasu in his *Social History of Kamarupa* (Vol. II. p. 168) " Kavindra patra (like his forefather who by introducing the custom of keeping genealogical registers had kept an authorised record of the status of the Kayasthas of Mithila) reconstructed on lines similar to those of his ancestor, the Kayastha community of Kamarupa. As in Mithila so in Kamarupa the Dasa are regarded as Kulinas, then come the Devas, and Dattas in point of honour in a social hierarchy, This order even now obtains among the Kayasthas of Kamarupa". This makes it likely that Mithilā was the original home of Kulinism; and lastly (d) according to certain scholars, though Harisinghdeva re organised society, the Panjis were known at the time of Nanyadeva (c. 1099). Now this date is very much earlier than the " legendary " ascription of Bengal panjis to the reign of Vallala Sen (c. 1158-1180). It may be pointed out that the text on which Bengali tradition makes Vallala Sen call person as Kulins is that of Vachaspati Mishra who flourished in about 15 cen, thus simultaneously confusing so early origin of Bengal Kulinism. It is not known when exactly Kulinism went to Bengal, but from what we know of the relations of Bengal and Mithila during 14th to 16th centuries it is possible that it went there when Bengali scholars used to haunt Maithila catuṣpāṭhis as students of Nyāya, Mimāmsā and Smrti-Nibandha-dharmashastras. Risley calls Maithil kulins as bikauas or vendors who married sometimes as many as forty or fifty wives, They are however more properly known as "Bhalamanusas".

minor sons of the kulins to marry the daughters of the lower families (whose number was more often, more than one, than not, in the case of each Kulina so marrying) on monetary terms. The evil effects of this system are today as much out of date in Mithilā as in Bengal, but the rivalry between the Kulins and the lowest families called Jayabārs in Mithilā somehow continues to this day. Formerly like the English aristocracy the high ranks of the Maithil Kulinism called *Bhalamānusa* were open to all, provided they deserved it.[19] But today much of its flexibility is gone and there remains only the last vestige of a very healthy custom. Maithili fiction is full of the discussion of various aspects of Kulinism.

V

LOVE OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

Another important aspect of Maithil cultural life has been its great devotion to the art of music. The first historical king of Mithilā, Mahārājādhirāj Nānyadeva (1097-1133 A.D.) of Karṇāṭa Dynasty, seems to have first seriously developed the popular Rāgas in Mithilā. He was followed by such great musicians as Mahārāja Harisiṁhadeva (1296-1323/4), Kavishekharācārya Jyotirishwara (c.1324), Singh-Bhūpāla, Jagaddhara, Jagajjyotirmalla, Vaṁshamaṇi Jha, Maharaj Shubhankara Thakkura (1584-1619), Ghanashyāma Mallika (c. 1680), Lochana (c. 1680) and various others who wrote authentic treatise on Maithil School of music. Their traditions were carried on to the present century. It was this unique development of music for so many centuries that gave Mithilā its great literature of Early Maithili, especially the lyrics of Vidyāpati, Umāpati, and Govindadās.

In another form this great devotion of Maithils to music created the glorious line of Kirtaniyā-actors. We know fully well the triumphs of Maithil traditions of orchestral music called Nāradīya and of numerous dramatic performances in Mithilā and Nepal. They expressed themselves by first introducing vernacular lyrics in regular Sanskrit dramas;

19 Thus even today any Brahmana can be promotd to a Srotriya or the highest class of Maithil Brahmanas by the Maharajadhiraja of Darbhanga, and in olden days we are told Kwkaḍī, Dhārā Jhā, Pinḍāruéha, Kāchuā, dhakajari, Kamalanarayana Pathaka etc. were raised from lower ranks, to higher ranks, vide Mithilamoda Vol. XXXII (New series), Udgara 38 p 12; XXVII (New Series), Udgara 4 p 24; Udgara 161 etc.

gradually they came to write wholly vernacular plays. In Assam Maithili music inspired and produced religious dramas called the *Ankiā-Nāt*. Thus it will be seen that one of the great contributions that Maithil culture has made to Indian culture is this : after the decline of Classical Languages it was the first to give vernacular a dignity of literary vehicle in the whole of Eastern India. Moreover, it was Mithilā which first evolved a fresh vernacular stage.

The *Kīrtaniyā* is a great cultural institution in Mithilā and if the entire history and tradition of even the present centres at Lagamā, Hāṭī and Ālāpur were to be published we shall know how by acting the *Uṣāharan*, the *Pārījātaharan*, or the *Rukminīharan* and by singing the operas of *Vidyā-Sundar*, *Mahābhārat*, or *Haragaurba-vivāha* and by performing the Lilās such as *Kadam-līlā*, they have amused and instructed men, women and children. The main characters of a group of kīrtaniyā actors are the Viduṣaka (Nārada), the Nāyaka (the leader and the Manager) and the Sakhīs. These Kīrtaniyās have also kept the light of Sanskrit poetry burning by reciting on performance days various songs and verses from Jayadeva or his imitators. They have been in every way the custodians of Maithila music and dancing. There has been no barrier of caste and occupation in being a member of the kīrtaniyā party. Brahmanas, Kāyasthas and even the Harijans have equally participated.

One of the most striking features of Maithila life may be noted in this very connection. Maithila women have been very fond of music. We have the stories of Mahādevī Lakhimā and of Candrakalā, the daughter-in-law of Vidyāpati, in medieval times. Of course owing to several causes, known to all of us, the tradition of these women has not been kept up untarnished. Yet there is evidence to prove that even as late as 150 years ago, most women in Mithilā preserved the "Pothī" of Maithila songs and *caritras* in their own hand. To-day these "Pothīs" are called "Geeta-ka Pothī" and are supplemented by printed pamphlets. There is generally a systematic entry in these *pothis* of all varieties of songs. The general heading of the type of songs under a section is given at the top, such as, Gosāuni-ka Geeta, Viṣṇupada, Nachāri, Tirahuti, Baṭagamanī, Occasional Songs, etc. Then, the songs are numbered under each heading as *pahila*, *dosara* etc., or merely dittos

(a-ijana) are written; and if some song is added as post-script "bānkī" is written. The range of Maithila songs as found in these "Pothīs" is usually limited to 'literary' types; mere folk forms are generally excluded because they are better preserved orally.

Of the several forms into which songs are classified in Mithilā, two peculiar forms may be noted here, the *Jog* and the *Uchiti.* The *Jog* is a class of songs which are sung to the bridegroom while he takes his principal meals, and purport to bind him to his bride by charms and magical incantations. Indeed their love for using songs as a medium of expression is so great in Mithilā that the words of courtesy and welcome are addressed to distinguished guests through "Uchiti" ("courtsey") songs.

One peculiar custom observed in Mithilā is that the guest is supposed to show regard for the host by stopping to take food when one of these *Uchiti* songs are being sung if the ladies stop for a while to begin another song.

Of course, there are olk songs for almost every step in the various Fasts and Festivals, and in religious and social functions. A discussion of these will mean a big essay.

VI

MAITHILA FOLK LITERATURE

Talking of Maithili songs one naturally remembers the great cultural force that the Ballads and other branches of Folk Literature have proved to be throughout the ages. The Maithili Ballads were collected and printed in part by Sir George Grierson in the *Z.D.M.G.* They however cover a very wide field. They deal with the famous exploits and romances of Salahesa, Lorika, Bihulā, Rajā Gopichand and Bhartihari as well as describe several princes and princesses. They are full of scenes of pathos and of adventure. They reveal the worlds of idealism and romance in which moments of happiness and glory are enshrined.

Numerous are the branches of useful folk-lore in Mithilā. There are innumerable aphorisms and verses current throughout the countryside which neatly summarize the truths of Astronomy, Arithmetic, Agricultural life and other useful lore. The most famous of

these are those by the well-known Dāka about whose identity long discussions have been carried on; recently my friend Pandit Sri Jivānanda Thakur made a strong plea to establish unmistakably his Maithila nationality.

One peculiar branch of popular poetry in Mithilā is called the *Vātāhvāna Kāvya.* It claims to make the wind blow when it is sung out loudly. Its three forms were made current respectively by Durgādatta, by Bhānā Jha and by Chandā Jha. I quote some lines from Bhānā Jha's poem[20]:

हसैत बजैत बक गेल हुलास,
हड़ीर महीरुह रचलनि वास ॥
हिरनीक हिलसा चञ्चु लगाव,
हसैत देखि कनैत नहि पाव ॥
होरिल सँ बक कएल परिहास,
करथु गमन बक वहथु बतास ॥
हसाक धोकड़ी मुसाक कान,
भरि भरि धोकड़ी पवन कें आन ।
तें भरि धोकड़ी गेलि पुनि फाटि,
दश दिश तखन पवन गेल पाटि ॥

The Prose folk tales of Mithila include religious vrata-kathās of the type of the Bengali vratakathās. These tales have a set and poetic language. They embody various Pauranic accounts of the origin of Mother Earth, the creation of animal world, the stories of Shiva and his consorts, the traditions of various gods and goddesses, and the tales of saintly men and women. The most famous of these is also the longest of them. It is called the *Madhushrābani-kathā* and is told in about fifteen days.

Other classes of Prose Maithila folk tales are Fairy Tales abounding in demons, adventurous princes and beautiful princesses; Moral Tales ending in some kind of moral generally summed up in a pithy aphorism or proverb; Tales of Fun and Laughter; Tales of Common

20 Published by Maithilla Printing Works Madhubani, p. 15. The last four

Life and lastly Tales for Children. I have unfortunately here no space to illustrate and to dwell upon the richness and variety of these types. They are taken from almost all classes and represent the wisdom and experience of Mithilā's teeming millions. They are invariably in simple prose and abound in striking situations.

There are however two famous cycles of stories which centre round two Falstaffs of Mithilawho must be referred to even in this brief survey because they have exercised the largest amount of influence on the genesis of Maithil humour. The first is Gonū or Gondū Jha whom we have recently been able to identify as having flourished some six hundred years ago. Like the name of Robin Hood in a different sphere, Gonu Jha's name has gathered round itself all sorts of apocryphal stories referring to him as alive in all ages. He is described as having played tricks with his patron, his barber, his mother, his preceptor, his friends, his enemies, almost with everybody he came in contact with.

The other figure who approximated Gonū in his *dhūrttatā* (jokes) was Bhana Jha who died at the beginning of the present century. The stories current about Bhana Jha are more witty than humourous and have a great deal of sarcasm in them.

VII

MAITHILA HUMOUR

Maithilī Language is perhaps one of the most successful vehicles of humour in all its forms. I should like to emphasise that the origins of Maithila humour lie in the social and economic life of Maithils. With plenty of agricultural produce, and with peaceful atmosphere all around they have found enough leisure to cultivate the niceties of their tongue. To quote from one of the modern Maithila humourists, Sri Harimohan Jha :—

"जीवन में बुझी तऽ दुइएटा आनन्द सर्वोपरि छैक—एक भोजन, दोसर गप्प। आओर एहि दुहू वस्तुक रस जतेक अपना देश में अछि ततेक आर कहां? भोजनक विन्यास आ' वाक्चातुर्य जनिका सिखबाक होइन्हि से तिरहुत आबिकऽ सीखथि। एहन सुन्दर सीटल गप्प, कटगर विनोद, सरस परिहास आर कतय भेटत?

बिचारि कऽ देखल जाय तऽ हमरा लोकनि ने कहियो मुख्य ठानल ने वाणिज्य-व्यवसायक झंझट बेसाहल। एतबा छि न केवल वाग्विन्यास-कलाक विकास कएल अछि। अएतव व्यंग्य, श्लेष, काकु, अन्योक्ति, वक्रोक्ति आदि अलङ्कार मिथिलाक बालक वा कन्याक जन्मसिद्ध चमत्कार बनि जाइत छन्हि, जे सिखएबाक प्रयोजन नहि।

मैथिल आर बङ्गाली, ई दुनू जाति माछ ओ गप्प बेत्रेक जीवित नहि रहि सकैत छथि।"*

This is why Śri Kumar Gangananda Sinha, Pandit Sitarama Jha and Sri Harimohan Jha and others have been able to give us some of the finest creations of humour in literature. Kumar Saheb's humour is cultured and extremely good-natured; Śri Sitarama Jha's distinctions of varieties of fools in society are marked by penetrating vision; Śri Harimohan Jha has created the immortal simpleton Jhara-khandi Jha (though his normal field is farcical humour, exhibiting 'ridicule' more than 'satire'); Śri. Tantranatha Jha follows the lines of Charles Lamb; and Sri Ishanatha Jha produces the earlier tradition of the Vipāṭa (-Vidūṣaka) in a remarkably successful modern setting. Earlier literature as well has shown great and funny pictures in the Maheshavanis of Vidyapati or in the Narada of dramas or in Bhimasena and Narada of Folk Tales. The supreme examples however remain to be enshrined in the cycles of stories current about Gonu Jha and Bhana Jha.

VIII

I should like to end by quoting the following lines of Bhana Jha (?), which summarises in many typical illustrations the peculiar features of a Maithil.

कोकटीक धोती पटुआ साग।
तिरहुति गीत बड़ए अनुराग॥
सुन्दर अमओट फोका मखान।
खिरसा केर लड़ुवी पकवान॥
जड़ी इसरगत कर में बान्ह।
अपना अपनी कुल अभिमान॥

* Preface to "*Praṇamya Devatā.*"

देवी उपासन सभ केओ जान ।
पाबनि सराही चौठीचान ॥
कदली थम्हक भोजन—पात ।
क्रिया कर्म्म में उज्ज्वल हात ॥
दहीक सौखी सकलो देश ।
धर्म्म कर्म्म रत रहए नरेश ॥
गप्पक रसिआ करए न कार ।
सभ दुःखक औषध फलहार ॥
भाव भरल पर तरुणी रूप ।
एतवे तिरहुत होइछ अनूप ॥[21]

IX

CONCLUSION

It will be clear from the above survey of some aspects of Maithila cultural life that in every way Maithil mind is fit to produce great literature and art: it has a sound tradition of scholarship ; its religious faith is deep and sustained ; its social and cultural life has great sources of creating poetry and drama of the highest order.

There are great possibilities of encouraging the Maithil brand by allowing its mother tongue the proper place in Bihar's educational and administrative spheres.

21(i) *Kokaṭi.*—is the indigenous cloth of Mithilā, famous for durability and fineness. In recent years Khādi has practically superseded it ; and we know the successful exhibition of the finest Khadi in India from Kapasiya at Rāmgarha Session of the All:India National Congress. Charkhā-made thread has been regarded as *the* pure thread for sacred thread on the day of sacred-thread ceremony and the Charkhā-made cloth has been *the* pure cloth after silk for ages in Mithilā.

(ii) The *Paṭuā* vegetable is not found in other parts of India ; its taste is bitter but people are very fond of it in Mithilā.

(iii) *Tirahuti* is a special name given to Maithila love poems which are considered to be Mithila's great achievement.

(iv) Mangoes and *Makhāna* are specialities of Mithila.

(v) The khirasā is a typically Maithil preparation of milk,

(vi) The roots of *isargata Pulika-Mūla* are found efficacious for warding off snakes.

(vii) *Kulinism* is ā typical institution of Mithilā. Compare Rama's curse quoted by Grierson in the Linguistic Survey: कुलाभिमानिनो यूयं मिथिलायां भविष्यथ.

(viii) Shakti worship in general and *Cauṭhacandra* vrata in particular are Mithilā's popular forms of upāsanā.

(ix) Taking food on thin pieces of the trunks of plantain trees specially prepaied is again peculiar to Mithilā.

(x) Kaımakānda rites are observed here with proper ceremonies.

(xi) Curd is profusely used here. In this connection it is worth noticing that as early as 1590 A. D. the *Ain-i-Akbari* says : "Its (Mithılā's) climate is excellent. Milk curds keep for a year without alteration."

(xii) The Maithils are fond of the niceties of tongue and are averse to industrias

(xiii) For all ailments they prescribe living on fruits.

Vol. XXXIII Parts. I & II

THE JOURNAL

OF THE

BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY



March & June. 1947

PATNA

Published by the Bihar Research Society

Price Rs, 10.